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SUBJECT: POST-MORTEM ON G8-RELATED NGO EVENTS

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[1](#)B. MOSCOW 7670

Classified By: DCM Daniel A. Russell for reasons: 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Looking back on the four non-governmental events ahead of the G8 Summit, NGO activists and opposition politicians have widely diverging assessments about their implications. Ella Pamfilova's July 3-4 Civil G8 highlighted the broad range of NGOs in Russia, notably those involved in non-political activity, and many human rights activists praised her for allowing some space for human rights issues as well, even as they worried that the event obscured worrisome trends that could affect their activities. Human rights activists believed their July 5 follow-on conference gave greater voice to their concerns. Views diverged most widely over the more political July 11-12 "The Other Russia" conference, with many seeing it as having damaged the democratic camp by highlighting its inability to unify while others argued that it provided a useful forum for opposition groups, albeit some anti-democratic ones. President Bush's July 14 meeting with activists was widely seen to have been an important expression of support for civil society. Although deeply divided, our contacts were unanimous in their appreciation for Western participation in the events, and they encouraged the U.S. to stay involved with Russian civil society. END SUMMARY.

THE CIVIL G8 AND A MORE HUMAN RIGHTS-FOCUSED FOLLOW-ON

[1](#)2. (C) From the Kremlin's perspective, the July 3-4 Civil G8 offered an opportunity to portray Russia as NGO-friendly and to engage Russian civil society activists and their counterparts from other G8 countries in discussions of G8 agenda items. NGO activists engaged in social and other non-political issues saw it as demonstrating the breadth of their work in Russia. Many Russian opposition groups were not invited, although, as noted in ref A, strong critics of the Putin administration such as Yuriy Dzhibladze played a role in organizing the event and independent groups such as Memorial took part. Civil G8 chair Ella Pamfilova, Chair of the Presidential Council for Development of Civil Society Institutions and Democracy, received praise from many of our opposition interlocutors for adding human rights to the event's agenda. Although participants were told not to focus primarily on Russia-specific issues, the format provided a starting point for discussing Russia's problems in the international human rights framework and for building relationships with foreign colleagues. President Putin impressed many of the participants during the two hours he spoke at the plenary session.

[1](#)3. (C) From the point of view of a number of our independent NGO interlocutors, the Civil G8 caused more harm than good. They argued that many of the foreign NGOs, particularly those with limited knowledge about Russia, likely came away with a distorted image of the country's civil society scene after witnessing a Kremlin "charm offensive." Irina Yasina, Executive Director of the Open Russia Foundation, described the Civil G8 as "theater" and said that many participants did not raise important issues for fear of spoiling their relations with the Kremlin.

[1](#)4. (C) For many NGOs, the July 5 follow-on conference was an important event because it allowed activists to openly discuss Russia's key human rights issues. That event was scheduled specifically so that Western activists already in town could attend, and all of the presenters were domestic activists who focused on Russian issues, including Kremlin policies toward media freedom, freedom of assembly, prison conditions and the North Caucasus. Leaders of Human Rights Watch told us they saw the event as the most significant of all those leading to the Summit, and organizer Yuriy Dzhibladze praised the resulting concrete recommendations. Nonetheless, as several activists told us, lack of publicity lessened the event's impact.

DEBATE OVER "THE OTHER RUSSIA" EVENT

[1](#)5. (C) Political activist Garri Kasparov, president of INDEM Foundation Georgiy Satarov, and leading human rights activist Lyudmila Alekseyeva organized "The Other Russia" to give voice to views across the spectrum of the political

opposition in hopes both of drawing international support and finding common ground (ref B and previous). The event had long been controversial among independent activists, primarily due to the participation of anti-democratic opposition figures such as National Bolshevik Party head Eduard Limonov and left-wing Labor Russia movement head Viktor Anpilov. Also, Yasina and DEMOS Center's Tatyana

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Lokshina told us they were uncomfortable with a conference that would bring together human rights activists and politicians, primarily for the latter's benefit as they saw it. There was uncertainty until shortly before the conference whether leading democratic opposition political parties Yabloko, the Union of Right Forces (SPS), and the Communist Party (KPRF) -- or their members, acting individually -- would attend. When Mikhail Delyagin, the head of Rodina's ideological department, decided to attend contrary to orders from his party, he was ousted from Rodina.

16. (C) Opinions about "The Other Russia" have ranged widely in the aftermath of the event. In addition to the Kremlin's pre-conference comments (ref B), Kremlin-friendly figures such as Public Chamber member Vyacheslav Nikonov have criticized it, arguing that it represented the views of only a tiny element of Russia's population. Other criticisms focused on the fact that it conflated civil society groups with political parties, when their roles should be separate. Youth activist Mariya Gaydar told us that the opposition's "ultra-liberal" focus on human rights prevented it from building a viable party platform that would connect with issues of concern to the broader population, such as family values, religious beliefs, and healthy patriotism. Kasparov, by contrast, told us the event, which was his idea, was a huge success. Perhaps showing a streak of defensiveness about the organizers' decision to include Limonov and Anpilov, he argued to us that excluding them would have detracted from the open spirit of the event.

17. (C) Demonstrations by pro-Kremlin groups, as well as arrests of four National Bolsheviks outside the conference hall, were heavily reported in the media, although there were significantly fewer disruptions than expected (ref B). Some participants saw such disruptions as showing the Kremlin's ability to hamper independent political activity. Others, like the Higher School of Economics' Yevgeniy Gaydar, told us that such behavior played into the organizers' hands and gave the event more publicity than it otherwise would have had.

18. (C) For several of our interlocutors, the fact that the conference could take place at all was an important victory for opposition forces. The Kremlin would have preferred to derail plans for "The Other Russia" ahead of time but had failed to do so, largely because of Western attention, said Aleksey Venediktov, chief editor of the independent Ekho Moskvy radio station. Carnegie Center's Liliya Shevtsova shared that view, telling us that the participation of Assistant Secretaries Dan Fried and Barry Lowenkron was an important symbol of support.

19. (C) Pro-Kremlin figures highlighted the refusal of Yabloko and SPS to attend as proof of the inability of democratic opposition elements to unify. Even a number of activists shared that view, with Shevtsova telling us that from the perspective of opposition unity, the event had been a significant failure. She also expressed concern about democrats joining such figures as Anpilov and Limonov on stage. In the view of others, the disunity could prove to be the kind of catalytic event that opposition democrats need. Yasina told us that the decision of Yabloko and SPS not to attend was a mistake that dispelled any lingering hopes that they could be partners in a united democratic effort. Venediktov shared with us his similar hope that the disunity might finally lead at least some of the democrats to subjugate their personal ambitions and seek common ground.

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A VALUED MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BUSH

10. (C) Several participants in the meeting with President Bush praised his willingness to meet with them personally. Yasina and World Wildlife Fund Russia head Igor Chestin told us they were impressed with the event's informality and the useful give-and-take. Echoing that view, "Da!" youth movement head Mariya Gaydar said that:
-- the meeting raised the international profile of its participants, particularly Open Russia and DEMOS, thereby offering them some protection from government harassment;
-- it offered President Bush specific areas of concern that he might raise with Putin, thus potentially exploiting Putin's desire to maintain a good reputation on civil society;
-- it allowed them to discuss U.S. funding for Russian NGOs;
and
-- it was a way to communicate directly with the President concerning civil society's situation in Russia.

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THE EVENTS' AFTERMATH

11. (C) For individual groups, we have seen little impact

resulting from their participation in the civil society events. On the negative side, human rights attorney Karina Moskalenko of the International Protection Center told us she believed there was a connection between the Center's participation in "The Other Russia" conference and a five million USD back tax bill levied on her Center on the grounds that donations from the National Endowment for Democracy, the MacArthur Foundation and Open Society are actually profits. On the more positive side, Yasina told us that following her meeting with President Bush and as a result of the attention it gave her, she was approached by staffers from the Public Chamber inviting her to take part in a competition for civil society funding.

¶12. (C) More broadly, Dzhibladze argued, politically active independent NGOs are as deeply divided as they were in the run-up to the G8. Some had felt that participating in the Civil G8 would mean they were contributing to the authorities' "PR campaign," while others refused to participate in "The Other Russia," feeling it would put their activities into question. After much discussion, the majority of groups agreed to attend all events, and to organize their own, separate human rights conference -- the event of July 5. Dzhibladze told us that the divisive debates going into the G8 might have a lasting effect on relationships among NGOs.

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COMMENT

¶13. (C) Russia's NGO community presents a complex picture, which the civil society-related events in the run-up to the Summit only served to highlight. For the large and growing group of NGOs that avoid politics and focus on social, health and similar issues, the Civil G8 underscored their existence and activities. For the NGOs involved in opposition politics, meanwhile, the various events offered an opportunity to highlight their concerns but also underscored the divisions that have long plagued them. Some of them -- despite serious reservations -- took part in the Civil G8, particularly after Pamfilova added human rights issues to that event's agenda. Some found common ground in "The Other Russia" forum, although these included radical elements which do not share democratic values, while others who continue to view themselves as opposition parties, including Yabloko and SPS, opted out of the event. In the current political atmosphere, all of these Russian democratic and politically independent entities represent a small percentage of the population even in the best of circumstances, and their continued infighting further hampers them.

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